

MARCH 14, 1985

Newspaper accounts of the farmers rally in Washington claim the event is making the bureaucrats nervous. The word is that the worthies are afraid the farmers will blowup like they did in the tractorcade days of the '70s and maybe do something violent like throwing a copying machine in reverse, or shutting down the switch on a computer.

Well, it hasn't been exactly soothing for the ones of us who have had to stay home while the protest was going on up there. We don't know whether the protesters are going to include us in their winnings or not. Also, should they try Mr. Reagan's patience too far, we won't know whether the protesters are going to be punished too.

Another bad thing about being a non-combatant is that our individual interests are apt to go un-protested. The press, for example, keeps blabbing that the government needs to put up the money for spring planting. Down here in the Shortgrass Country, after we've planted a few packages of yellow squash and a scattering of cucumber seeds, we've done all the sowing that we do for the year.

In fact, Shortgrass herders have a hard time relating to any of the grievances that other agriculture regions have. I was shocked to hear that the farm debt was a problem. As long as I can remember, hollow horn and woolie operators have owed about nine times more money than the Third World countries could get down on their appeals for financial aid.

I just thought we were in an eternal, ongoing struggle with the banks to talk the jugkeepers out of another year's operating money, and that was that. I was surprised to learn that we were a national issue. I'd been passing blissful summers and hard winters on the supposition that no one was taking us seriously except a few of the more picky loan companies and perhaps a jug or two that couldn't stand the pressure of our business...

In the past 10 days I made a round of the jugs in San Angelo. Sure, I noticed it was like being what I suppose it's like to be an undercover agent, or being invisible. But it's been ages since a bank employee higher than a security guard or an errand boy has paid much attention to hombres wearing hats and boots.

On one of those days I sat close to a couple of bank officers in a coffee joint that on previous years had invited me to share their lunch hours. They were as intent on their soup as a serious student of the kettle drums must be. Never missing a beat with their spoons until the end of their meal.

As they got up to leave, the junior officer asked how I was doing. Before I thought, I said that I'd been marking time every since interest was deregulated.

Was that ever a mistake! He froze so dead in his tracks the waitress had to get the cook to heat some hand towels to release the muscles in his hindlegs. I don't guess I could have found a word or a phrase in the English language that was more inappropriate. My mouth invariably oversteps my brain. I was nearly as stricken as the bank officer.

On the way home to the ranch, I dearly wished I'd been trapped for a dangerous position on the Washington front. Anything will beat hurting banker's feelings. I'm sure sorry to hear we are in bad shape and it sounds like big mouths like me are going to slow the recovery.